XIO3

GCACE

Garden City Atari Computer Enthusiasts
1003 Amphion St. Victoria, B.C. Canada V8S 4G2

MAY/JUNE 1998

Inside

ATARI®

ATARI® NEWS AND RUMOURS

by Rowland Grant

A subsidiary of Hasbro Interactive (which is itself a subsidiary of Hasbro) bought the Atari assets from JTS for $5 million. Hasbro is mainly interested in the Atari game titles. Their version of the old Konami game "Frogger" is selling fairly well. So Hasbro has become interested in what they call retro games or new versions of older popular titles. They picked up about 75 titles from Atari, but they are particularly interested in the classics such as Centipede, Missile Command, Battlezone, Pong, Breakout and Tempest. Hasbro Interactive intends to release Centipede on both PC and Sony PlayStation later this year. These Atari games will be adapted for the Nintendo 64 also. Recently Hasbro acquired Tiger Electronics, a maker of children's electronics. There are rumours that Tiger might use Atari Lynx hand held game machine technology in some of its products. It is not clear whether the Atari label will appear on any of these.

There are rumours that Hasbro had been interested in Atari for some time and would have paid much more for the assets. However, JTS is now in a very difficult situation. It is in desperate need of cash to stay alive. The JTS stock prices prior to Hasbro's purchase were around 20 cents. So the whole company was worth less than 20 million. In that light, five million for the inactive Atari division was a fair price, even if the assets are worth much more in the hands of others. Still, there has been an outcry from some shareholders, possibly a class action suit against JTS. After all, in the Atari-JTS merger, Atari promised that the Atari division would continue. There are rumours of investigations by various government agencies too. Recently JTS stock prices dropped to 12 cents. The American Stock Exchange (AMEX) stated

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CREDITS

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MEMBERSHIP

Membership dues are $25 per family per year. Membership includes a subscription to this newsletter, access to over 1000 8-bit public domain disks and over 2 gigabytes of ST public domain software and increased time and upload/download ratio on the club BBS, Pothole. It can be reached by modem at (250) 642-6795.

MEETINGS

Meetings will be held in the Nellie McClung branch of the Library at 3950 Cedar Hill Road (corner of McKenzie) on the fourth Thursday of each month. All meetings are at 7 pm. There is no meeting in the month of December.

EDITORIAL

Although you may find it hard to believe, I actually have nothing to say in the editorial this issue. Because of that, I turn it over to Doug Skrecky, who sent me the following jokes via email. Thanks, Doug.

A college student picked up his date at her parents home. He'd scraped together every cent he had to take her to a fancy restaurant. To his dismay, she ordered almost everything expensive on the menu. Appetizers, lobster, champagne. . .the works. Finally he asked her, "Does your Mother feed you like this at home?
"No," she said, "but my Mother's not looking to get laid, either.

A man's business trip gets cancelled so he is at home instead, with a rather nervous wife. They go to bed, but at about midnight the phone rings. Before the wife can get it, the man rolls over and answers it.....
"Hello? What? How the hell should I know .... I live in Phoenix."
He slams the phone down, and rolls over grumbling. His wife asks, somewhat nervously, "Who was it, dear?" "I don't know," the man replied, "Some idiot.....wanted to know if the coast was clear."

Mrs. Culpepper was almost in tears. "Oh Marie," she said to her maid, "I have reason to suspect that my husband is having an affair with his secretary."
"I don't believe it for one minute." Marie snapped. "You're just saying that to make me jealous."

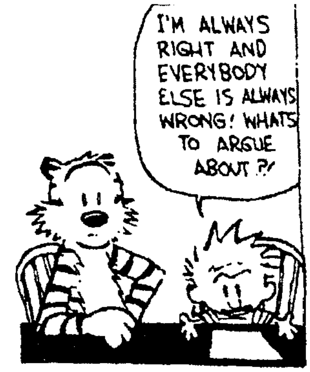
Gord

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DOS & Operating System	John Picken	598-2386
Games	Ted Skrecky	598-6173
Programming	John Picken	598-2386
	Bob Nex	642-6358
Word Processing	John Picken	598-2386
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Games	Ted Skrecky	598-6173
Telecommunication	Ted Skrecky	598-6173
TOS & Operating System	John Towler	382-5083
Word Processing	Gord Hooper	475-0857
Hardware:		
Repairs, Sales, Upgrades	Steve Lemmen	595-7811
Modem & printer setup	John Picken	598-2386
Other Computers:		
Apple Macintosh	John Towler	382-5083
Commodore Amiga	Ted Skrecky	598-6173
IBM's and clones	Rowland Grant	598-3661
	Bob Nex	642-6358

PEEKing Around

by Gordon F Hooper



...JOHN TOWLER is now working at the Fort and Foul Bay Government Dairy, one of many I use to keep my vodka stocked up. John still misses occasional GCACE meetings because of his misplaced priorities. He seems to feel it is more important to make a living than attend computer club meetings... Very little has been heard from JOHN PICKEN lately because he is taking a course on business. It's to be hoped that they won't destroy his wicked sense of humour with dry business procedures. Our executive meetings would be a lot less enjoyable without his jokes. You think it's not wicked? Ask him for some jokes about wives, popsies or strumpets. I'm not saying he's a misogynist, but don't get him started if there's a feminist within earshot. The resulting confrontation would be nuclear... TED SKRECKY has also been provokin laughter by relating complaints about his job through email to his brother DOUG, which are carbon copied to your faithful scribe. It seems they do inventory counts on paper clips and post-it notes used in his place of business. He even claims it is necessary to bring your own toilet paper to work if you have any pretensions about hygiene. I suggested he should use company letterhead for that job, but he didn't think that was too good an idea. I guess he wants to keep his job too... If you have nothing better to do for two hours or more, ask DAN MOEN about the women in his life. Mid-life crisis strikes again!... ART NEWMAN, one of our Vancouver corresponding members, phoned recently about problems with his hard drive. I steered him to STEVE LEMMEN and CRAIG CARMICHAEL, who hopefully helped him out. If not, phone back, Art. We'll figure it out eventually...If President Clinton's Secret Service agents can be forced to tell what they've heard in the course of their duties, surely GCACE members should have no qualms about giving me some gossip. Phone GORD at 475-0857...

Oases: Getting Ready to Bloom

by Craig Carmichael

Last year saw Oases BASIC, 24 bit color (Mac), photographic color printing and more. Here's the first half of 1998:

Library: New Books * Automatic Picture Importing (Scrolls for GIF, TGA and BMP formats). * CD manager. (AKA Oases Extendos?) Now Oases reads CD's on the Atari. * DOS or Atari format disks, drives, zips on Mac.

File-Director (the standard file window): beats Windows, Mac, GEM! * Pictures View folder as Pictures! That's right -- instead of seeing a bunch of useless file names of pictures, you can see the actual pictures, in thumbnail sizes. ...Those books for the clipart CD? Forget 'em, you don't need them anymore!

* Fonts Font file names are shown in their own font! No more trying out each font 'til you stumble onto one that's suitable!

Oases Text Turns Hot A new 'Html-Cmd' command character has been defined in Oases' universal text format:. Now links can be buried inside Oases text. Micro-Word has a link edit line, and the "browse" mode lets you surf Oases text just like the web!

* Oases-to-HTML text converter. No need to maintain a document in different formats -- just print or convert to HTML as the occasion requires. Next: an HTML-to-Oases auto text converter. Will Micro-Word become a web browser, too?

* To make it even easier, there's an automatic link generator. Just tick the source words, say a table of contents, and '+' the matching destinations, i.e. the chapter or section headings. Run the link generator, and the table of contents is hot-linked into the text.

By new accent mark sorcery, the Oases extended character set now contains virtually every glyph from Unicode (to character #255) plus ALL the PC 'code-page' sets, except double-line line graphics symbols, plus a bunch more that none of them have, and we haven't even hit #255 yet (which is not a limit in Oases anyway)!

Printing: Photo-Perfect The next page(s) is processed while printing -- my TT runs a 5 PPM laser printer with scarcely a pause. Multiple copies from one page render. The new landscape print orientation option permits bigger pictures.

It's Availabile (right?) Oases-for-Atari (v.3.38) should be on the web site www.oases.com when you read this. The Mac version is being held back pending possible commercial usage negotiations. As an Atari user, you're in luck, it's free!

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that JTS no longer fully satisfied all the guidelines for continued listing. So JTS consented to the removal of its common stock and debentures from AMEX. The last day for trading was May 22, 1998. While JTS stock could trade on a private, over the counter basis, I expect that there will be little interest in it now. The once mighty Atari has become food for vultures. And the parts that are left are rapidly decaying.

Telegames released another Jaguar game in May. This is Worms, a popular game on a number of platforms. The price of $69.95 will barely cover the costs. It is one of the last Jaguar games and is being promoted as a collector's item. Battlesphere, the ultimate Jaguar game has still to appear. Apparently there are numbers of tiny cosmetic bugs that have to be dealt with. The game is going into a cartridge, so the final code has to be close to perfect. If Battlesphere was a PC game it could have shipped months ago, and patches would be released to fix the bugs. But you can't patch code in a cartridge. While the Battlesphere coders were publicly bemoaning the lack of interest from investors, Robert Di Benedetto at Microsoft Canada responded that he had been trying to get them to show Battlesphere to Microsoft for some time. Anyway, the wait for Battlesphere must be nearing the end. Recently 4Play requested that Jaguar users reconfirm their interest so that they could estimate the number of cartridges in the first production run.

I understand that at one time JTS intended to release TOS into the public domain. They began by checking on the rights to GEM formerly held by Digital Research. Caldera now owns most of Digital Research's properties, and has allowed the free use of CPM, CPM/68K, GEM and DRDOS for non-commercial purposes. However Caldera is holding on to the copyrights. Since TOS is a modification of CPM/68K combined with GEM, JTS could not take the matter further. Of course the GEM held by Caldera was crippled by legal action from Apple years ago. Atari was exempted from this action by Steve Jobs. Thus the GEM with TOS is much superior to other versions. Now TOS is owned by Hasbro Interactive, and its intentions are unknown.

Falke in Germany has claimed ownership of TOS, but I suspect it only has a licence to modify TOS for use in the Milan computer. Similar ownership claims by Wizztronics have turned out to be a limited licence. While nobody has reported having been able to buy a Milan computer, the Milan web page reports that a dealer network is being set up in Western Europe. About 20 dealers have already signed up to sell the Milan in Germany. And Falke has arranged for the distribution of Milan computers in Holland, England, France and Italy as well. Wizztronics in the US is also working on a computer very similar to the Milan in specifications. Wizztronics is also working on an improved TOS. Suggestions for changes and fixes of GEM-TOS have been requested.

Keith Scroggins reports that he has made a deal with Toad Computers to purchase all of their remaining inventory of Atari hardware and software. He is working on an inventory listing. He will be advertising on his Web site. Recently he posted a list of CD's including the Atari Compendium disk that Toad published a few years ago. It has been reported that Toad's UMich mirror site has been discontinued. Toad has finally done a complete withdrawal from Atari computer products.

ST Informer magazine went out of business when Toad withdrew its advertising a couple of years ago. Rod Macdonald vowed to continue the magazine on the internet. *ST Informer's* website has been stagnant for awhile. Now Scott Tirrell has been appointed the Web Editor of *ST Informer*. He is posting Issue 98 and will try to keep going with monthly issues. *ST Informer* is in a temporary spot on the web until a site host can be found locally. While the current issue has mostly ST/Falcon articles, it also has an article on 8-bit disk drive repair and another about the 7800 game machine. The on-line magazine follows the same general format as the original *ST Informer*. The success of these on-line magazines depends very much on contributed articles. *ICTARI* is another such magazine that has been stagnant for awhile due to lack of contributions. *ICTARI* is an Atari programmer's magazine and issue 82 was recently posted after much delay. On the other hand *ST Plus Fanzine* has just published the May issue, number 28. It is now available in printed form for a nominal amount from several sources. I managed to get the issue 26, released in March. Most articles are rather short, but they are very well done. An article by Tony Greenwood entitled "An idiot's Guide To HTML" is very informative. It is running in serial form over the next three of four issues. There were some interesting ads (advertising is free), including one for a game called Mummy's Playtime by Silly Software. The game wasn't ready in March, but now the author claims that it is in a workable state and playtesters are needed.

The most active area for ST development just lately has been internet communications. There is a new browser available named Light of Adamas. It has a mail reader as well. Unfortunately Adamas uses a special protocol provided by its own stack/dialer called Draconis. Peter Rottengatter, author of the popular STinG dialer, reports that he getting in contact with Jens Heitman, author of Adamas and Draconis, to work out some means by which Adamas and its other software could run under STing. Alex Clauss, the author of the excellent Crystal Atari Browser (CAB) reports that his latest version, CAB 2.7 is in English this time. Each version brings Atari users closer to enjoying the web on much the same footing as owners of other platforms. There is another news package by Christian Andersson called FireNews.

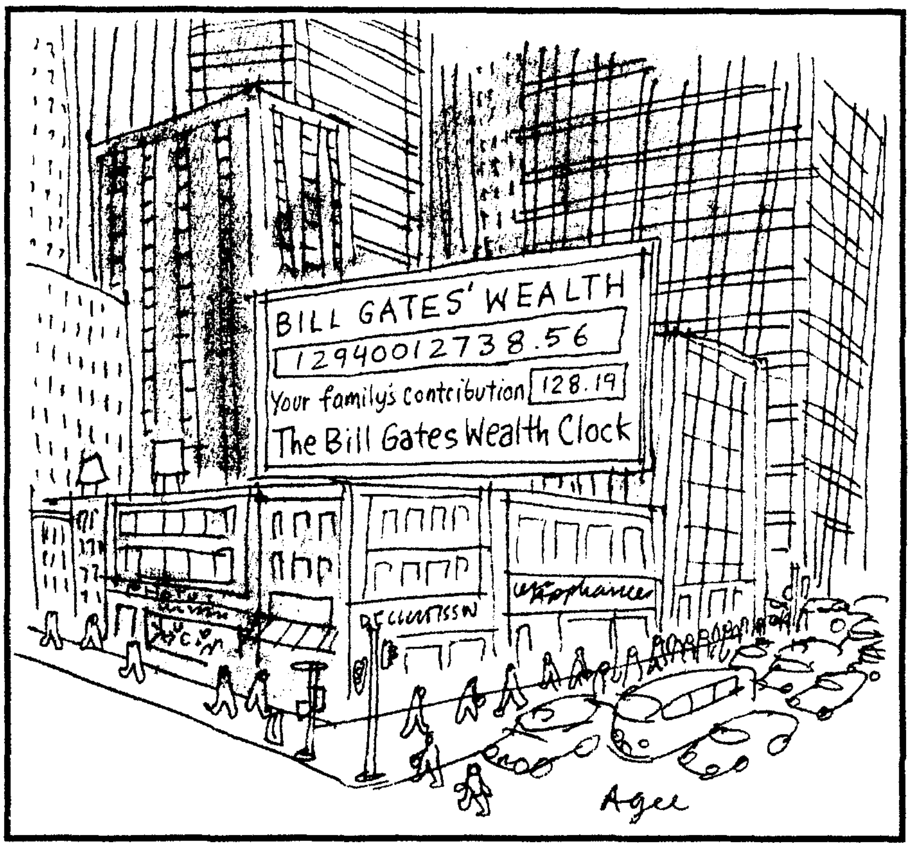
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This is an off-line news reader. A small program called Babel does the fetching and sending of news messages for FireNews. Babel will work with STiK and STinG, the popular stack dialers. Another program compatible with STiK and STinG is MyMail by Eric Hall. This mail reader and editor has been improved recently. Rich Sanchez is still supporting BBS Express! ST. Express is now up to version 1.98a with a number of minor enhancements.

In the Sound and Music department, Electronic Cow in Britain has released Scribble Synth, a software based sound synthesizer that allows you to draw frequency envelopes with a mouse. This can lead to the production of all sorts of unusual sounds and sound effects. They have also created EC-909, an analog drum machine emulator. In California, William Wong has released version 4.3 of PHPLAYER. This software plays sound files in most popular formats. PHPLAYER has numerous new options including protocols for a multitasking operating system. Best of all it is freeware.

There is a vector image editing package called Arabesque 2 Vector. It handles all formats including EPS, CVG and GEM. There are English and German version available for $60 US from the author J. Tochtenhagen. Gribnif Software is marking its tenth anniversary with a half price sale on its major products. I looked at my copy of Neodesk 1.0, and truly it has been ten years. Dan Wilga continually upgraded this replacement desktop, increasing its power and stability. Another valuable type of replacement is the file selector. Atari's original selector was so miserable that a number of replacements were marketed. Freedom 2 is a file selector still being supported. It was shareware, but the full version required a key patch from the author. The latest version of Freedom 2, while it is still shareware, requires no key. Uwe Seimet continues to upgrade his HDDRIVER, now version 7.5. This version will now handle DMA type devices (hard drives or CD ROMs). These are very fast IDE devices using the ATAPI standard, which functions somewhat like SCSI. Also I understand that NVDI version 5 will be released soon. It is supposed to feature printing as a background task. And Richard Karsmaker is planning to release version 8.1 of Ultimate Virus Killer UVK 2000 sometime this summer. Atari had no success in marketing its products in Japan. However I notice that someone called D-Lab in Japan has created freeware for the ST. This software includes a text viewer and a word processor that handles Japanese characters. A high speed text viewer handling ASCII and a realtime MIDI monitor are also available. Atari is dead. But Atari computer users are alive everywhere.



PC Horror Story!

by Ted Skrecky

Around two Gigabytes worth of Atari ST public domain and shareware software has been added to our software library. I recently purchased Suzy B's Atari Software Treasury #1 and #2 from the Computer Dungeon. Treasury #1 is a two CD set of uncompressed software. Treasury #2 is one CD but all the files have been compressed. I don't have a CD player attached to my Atari ST but my Pentium game system has a 24X CD device. I had to format nine disks at 720K in order to put the catalogue listings for these CDs on disk. These CDs have the best catalogue I have ever seen as each file has a very good, informative description.

The Suzy B CDs will be available at each club meeting so, if there is anything you want, it can be easily copied. However, you are going to need a copy of the software listings. With nine disks worth of text, it is going to take along time to read through it all but, if there are specific topics you are interested in, the listings are divided into text files with filenames such as GAMES, VIRUS, UTILITIES, etc. so that will make searching for what you want a little bit easier. I am planning on going through these CDs and the programs that are deemed worthy will be added to our own GCACE catalogue. If you don't want to spend many hours reading the Suzy B listings, you can always check any GCACE catalogue updates for some of the better stuff that I will be pulling from the CD collection.

I have discovered that it is a good idea to back-up any important files on one's hard drive to disks. A month ago a bad sector developed in the File Allocation Table (FAT) on the C partition on my hard drive. Files on this partition were getting scrambled and the hard drive was not booting properly. Eventually, even booting from a floppy disk didn't work. I tried numerous programs and could not get a file directory of any partition. I was one mouse-click away from reformatting my hard drive when I decided to have a look at ICD's Clean Up program. With it I managed to restore the partitions and gain access to all the files. I immediately started to archive and dump everything on my hard drive to disks. This process took a number of days as I had quite a few megs worth of programs and text files to deal with. After formatting my hard drive, the bad sector was "mapped-out" and everything has worked great since then. If any members of the club have problems with their hard drive or anything else Atari hardware related, don't forget that Steve Lemmen (595-7811) can still help you. Also, members of your club executive might be able to assist you with certain problems. Just phone our President, El' Gordo and, if he can't help you, he would at least know somebody who could. One thing for sure is, if you start suffering from flaky hardware, the problem can most likely be fixed so it really isn't necessary to blow $2,000 or more on one of those new, evil Intel/MicroSoft computers.

Since I have just said the "Intel/MicroSoft" word, I might as well mention a PC horror story I have experienced. I purchased a video digitizer for my Pentium computer. I had no problem putting the card in the slot but it took me close to 2 hours to get Windows 95 to properly install the video driver. Windows 95 told me to insert a disk in Drive A but the digitizer came with a CD only. I used good old DOS and found the subdirectory the drivers were in but, when using Windows 95, the subdirectory showed as having no files. In the Win 95 setup I found an option for displaying all file types so I selected it. After doing that I still could not get the driver to load until, while goofing around, Win 95 finally accepted the driver. I have no idea what caused this to finally work but I think I basically just got lucky.

The latest news about the Victoria Freenet is that the software they are using is still not working properly! Zmodem continues to abort during file downloading but it seems to be working better than it used to as I can sometimes download files in the 600K range. One thing I have picked-up is Edith Pro. This was a commercial text editor which has now been released to the public. Unfortunately, the author has placed restrictions on the methods of distribution. You can get the program for free by downloading it from the author's web site but all other forms of distribution are forbidden so I really can't add this program to the club library. However, if anyone would like to check-out this text editor, I can make a copy of it. I suspect a giant foot will not descend from the heavens and make me go splat for doing this.

Club member Bruce Funk borrowed the ST back-up library and has copied all the disks onto two 88 meg SyQuest removable cartridges. That must have kept him busy! Bruce says he will be bringing his SyQuest drive along with the two carts to our meetings which means I don't have to bring our ST library collection of over 200 disks. This is rather convenient since on club night I have always had to carry a rather heavy box out of my Condo and down to Rowland's car. When Bruce can't make it to a meeting, I will bring "the box" but it will be nice not to have to do it all the time. By the way, the SyQuest drives have been available for our Atari computers for quite a few years but I have only this minute figured-out why I never bought one. While looking at the April 1993 issue of Current Notes I have just noticed a Toad Computers advertisement which lists the SyQuest 88 meg mechanism at $549 (US). Ouch!

Well, that is all I have to say for this report. See you at the next club meeting.

What's Old Is New Again!

by Rowland Grant

Andre Fachat is still working on his GeckOS/A65 operating system for 6502 based computers. It has reached version 2.0. So far he has it running on his own Gecko computer and the Commodore 64. Andre is hoping that others will port A65 over to the Atari and Apple II platforms. So far the system has some unix features such as multithreading and task priorities. Also it supports internet connectivity using a SLIP connection.

ICD, the originator of Sparta DOS is planning to put up some 8-bit history pages on the Web. Tom Harker reports that they still have some MIO boards and special RAM chips in stock as well as some spare parts for repairing their 8-bit products. Tom says that ICD is very busy now with several projects, but when there is more time he will gather the parts, test the MIO boards and quote prices.

Bob Klass reports that he has a new CD-ROM disk prepared. Most of the contents are from the old Pool Disk with the A.C.E. of Utah disk library and the old S.P.A.C.E. disk library added. He has included some text files concerning game hints and programming. There is also the BBS Express Professional demo along with a number of user written extensions and games to go with it.

A group called OMC/HieroGraphix Online is working on an 8-bit original title called "The Assassin". They are targeting the 8-bit emulator users. A demo should be ready in two or more months. And speaking of emulators, Darek Mihocka is now shipping XFORMER 98 Atari 8-bit emulator for Windows 95, Windows 98 and Windows NT. XFOR- MER will now run in a window or full screen. It supports all Windows compatible joysticks and emulates true 4-channel POKEY sound. The demo of XFORMER 98 is available, and the sound of IT does not seem to live up to its advertisement. Also reports say that the emulation is still too slow, even when XFORMER runs on a fast Pentium. Some say that even the discontinued XL-it has better sound emulation. And the current (free) Atari800 emulator is has been judged equal to XFORMER.

Mathy Van Nisselroy reports that he has an Iomega ZIP drive connected to his Black Box 8-bit interface. He says that it works well. The connection involved a short SCSI adapter cable and a Parity PAL chip.

Steven Posey reports that while he was in college he used his 8-bit Atari as an alarm system. When his door was opened it broke a connection to the joystick port. This triggered the computer to run a sampled sound sequence (his room-mate screaming). He used Parrot software to create the sample. He wrote a BASIC program that would check on the number of times that the door was opened during the day. And for good measure, it would sound the scream at random intervals too.

The next great improvement in Wintel machines is being touted. This is the Universal Serial Bus (USB). It enables the daisy chaining of various devices such as drives, printers, modems. The new consumer Macintosh, iMac will have no disk drive built in, but will have two of these USB ports. Panasonic and Imation are producing a disk drive for the iMac that uses the USB ports. Twenty years ago a group of talented engineers designed a serial bus for another new computer design, the Atari 400/800. The single universal port (SIO) was controlled by software involving a device handler table and simple flexible code. With this system you could hook up four disk drives, a printer, a cassette drive, a parallel and serial port interface or a midi interface, all chained together. It's taken the computer industry twenty years to adopt the old Atari design concepts.



"On the Internet, nobody knows you're a dog."

Hardware Recycled

by Rowland Grant

The March general meeting featured our annual Swap and Shop. There were fewer goodies available this year, but a lot of hardware was recycled even so. Notable were the hand-dipped candles that Craig Carmichael brought (by accident), and sold at bargain prices. Thanks are due to John Towler who donated cartons of old Atari books and magazines to the library.

The April meeting had no special topic. However, Bruce Funk demonstrated his latest hardware. This was an old SCSI interface in a hard drive case (Supra?) into which he had put a Syquest 88 MB removable media drive. Bruce had obtained a few 88 MB cartridges from somewhere and copied the whole club ST library onto two of them. Bruce attached his Syquest to my Mega ST, and it worked using ICD software. Librarian Ted Skrecky proceeded to fill library requests using Bruce's system. Bruce promised to bring his Syquest to future meetings.

Male or Female?

And now for the question of the day - is your computer male or female? You decide! As you are aware, ships have long been characterised as being female (e.g."steady as she goes" or "she's listing to starboard Captain!").

Recently, a group of computer scientists (all male) announced that computers should also be referred to as female. Their reasons for drawing this conclusion follow:

Five Reasons to Believe Computers are Female

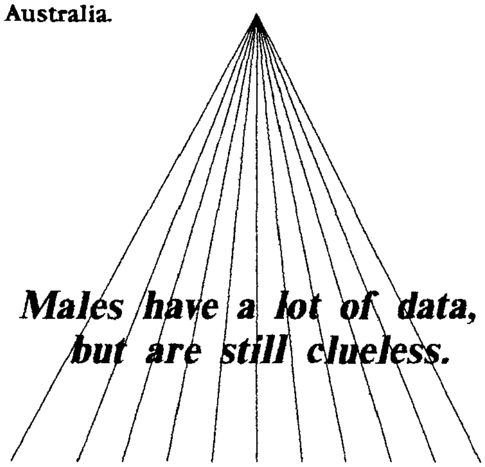
1. No one but the Creator understands their internal logic.
2. The native language they use to communicate with other computers is incomprehensible to everyone else.
3. The message "Bad command or file name" is about as informative as "if you don't know why I'm mad at you, then I'm certainly not going to tell you"
4. Even your smallest mistakes are stored in long-term memory for later retrieval.
5. As soon as you make a commitment to one, you find yourself spending half your paycheque on accessories for it.

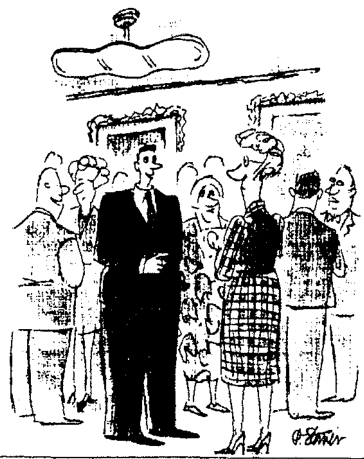
However, another group of computer scientists (all female) think that computers should be referred to as male. Their reasons are as follows:

Five Reasons to Believe Computers are Male

1. They have a lot of data, but are still clueless.
2. They are supposed to help you solve problems, but half the time they ARE the problem.
3. As soon as you commit to one, you realise that if you had waited a little longer you could have obtained a better model.
4. In order to get their attention, you have to turn them on.
5. Big power surges knock them out for the rest of the night.

Thanks to David Leaver of Hawker, Australia.





"Smaller, more powerful chips allow me to have a smaller head"